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Music and the visual arts are persistent areas of interest in my life; as a person who seeks to understand connections between and within the inner and outer worlds I designed a thesis project toward better appreciation of the relationship between music and art. This document chronicles the progression of my journey into and through an exploration of the association between music and art as well as the development of my thought and art-making regarding this subject. Along the way I encountered more questions than answers; in hope that others will continue this exploration and because questioning is an integral component of the thesis project entire I include both my significant findings and my ‘unfinished business’. The investigative procedure involved listening, discussing, and creating through writing and art-making; both writing and art-making are vital ways in which I formulate understanding (though writing is often the dominant avenue) and so both methods of approach are represented here.

In addition to exploring the idea of form and discovering visual forms which correspond to musical forms this investigation involved studying and developing my unique way of thinking and approaching ideas. Looking through notes written throughout the semester I sense my initial approach was from an intellectual and theoretical standpoint; at that time I was concerned more with analyzing the construction and meaning of music (the concept of music) than making contact with existing musical works. Below are some of the questions pertinent to my early studies which I later left behind to follow an emerging interest and ability to explore and understand music through creating—a method more intimate, personal, physical and connected to music itself than the abstracted approach of purely mental contemplation. Both types of awareness are valid and necessary and I believe their co-use enriched this investigation and my knowledge of the subject; however, being generally inclined toward intellectual formation of
understanding it was beneficial that I struggled toward including an ‘understanding by creating’ approach. Reviewing these early intellectual pursuits revives an interest in such understanding, and I now have some comments on a few of these queries:

Is music linear and forward progressing or perhaps circular in nature? Are there places in music which go inward rather than forward? I came to this question while drawing and listening to music simultaneously. After the song had finished I looked at my drawing and sensed it to be linear and forward progressing—relating very much to time and space. At first thought it seemed that music also is linear and forward moving because it does occupy a specific amount of time, having a beginning, middle, and end which one would relate to ideas of past, present, and future. In addition, music has a physical presence in that can ‘fill’ a space with sound and also in that it becomes, during its duration, a part of your corporeal existence. So, then, while music itself is linear and forward moving in nature—having a certain, progressive development requiring space in which to advance—perhaps the *experience* of music can include other dimensions such as inward, backward, or circular movement. The idea of inward movement in particular may relate to different sensations of time, especially the sensation of timelessness which one may feel when thoroughly immersed and interested in something. For example, I often enter this sense of timelessness when listening to certain pieces of music, watching certain thought-provoking films, or working well in the creative state. In such situations an awareness of passing time is not present; rather there is a continual impression of being completely in the moment (an endless moment) and of moving further *into* something—the work itself, a thought or idea, or the general experience. The thought about music possibly being circular came while listening to and watching a performance of *Firedance* from the Riverdance show. Though the musical sound seemed at first to be moving forward, much of the dance component (by one individual) was
circular; I sensed the dance directly correspond to the musical sound and wondered, then, whether music could be experienced as circular rather than linear. The form at left was an early creation and relates, I believe, to this idea of music (and not necessarily to any particular musical work) being circular through the way it was made—a continuous line circling in and out of the center (what I call the ‘still center’).

Is musical form collective or individual—one sound or many together or both? This question evolved from my initial difficulty in understanding the idea of form—what is form, where is it found, what does it mean, etc. Through my investigation I have come to believe that form can be either collective or individual—or in other words visual form can correspond to one sound (such as a slap) or many sounds (such as five seconds of a musical work or a whole musical work). In this study I chose to focus on forms which directly describe groups of sounds from musical works.

What IS music? This question could open into multiple ways of approaching and understanding music—such as the meaning of music, the structure of music, or the fundamental nature of music. A few possible related ideas to consider include: music is sound/vibration; music exists(?) only when played; music invites interaction and involvement; music includes (or is made up of or made up by) the author/composer, the director, the performing individual or ensemble, various instruments, breath and/or touch, the audience, acoustics, and other components which impact musical form (what I am thinking of as the essence of music). One could argue that musical form is also comprised of or influenced by what the composer intended, the experience of each performer, the ideas of the director, the collective and individual
experience of audience members, and variations in sound during different performances. Although it is appealing to consider all the components of music what I was interested in while composing the above question and what I continue to be interested in is this: what is essential or fundamental to music (and particular pieces of music) in such a way that if it were to be subtracted music would no longer be music?

What does it mean to make contact with something? How does one make contact and what must be included for that to occur—does contact involve a way of thinking/approach or an end result or both? An early idea on this subject was that contact is a part of you recognizing something similar or the same in another place. A related question, then, is can we only recognize and subsequently make contact with that which is already a part of ourselves? And does this relate to the importance of expanding yourself in various ways—intelectually, creatively, relationally, etc—so as to make more contact?

What parts of a form, if any, are determined by the context of the form? In a similar sense, what parts of a human being are determined by environment?

What is musical form or essential form in music? Are the essential forms in music the same as those in art? Are they tangible or intangible? How can such forms be put in to the visual world as a direct correspondence and not a reference? Can musical form BE visual form? If only a reference, is one a reference to the other and vice versa or are both referencing something else?

After generating a multitude of questions early in the investigation I chose to concentrate on aspects of the last question above—specifically the discovery and creation of relationships between musical form and visual form. Although I’ve spent a semester intensively exploring such relationships, the journey toward this investigation began many years ago. Looking back, I identify the first experience with a particular piece of music as the ‘beginning’ or initiating factor...
in my curiosity; though one could also say I was lead into this interest through a multitude of life experiences and choices (everything is connected). The musical work I find so fascinating and which sparked an appreciation for musical-visual relationships is Caoineadh Cu Chulainn, or Lament, from Riverdance. Lament is performed by one individual, alone on stage though supported by hidden background instrumentalists, playing the uilleann pipes (a traditional Irish instrument). Similar to the Scottish bagpipes, the uilleann pipes are played by forcing air with the arm into a pipe which is played like a recorder. Even though no breath is used, there are definite moments which sound akin to an instrumentalist taking a breath or using the last of a breath. In my experience as a clarinet player instrumentalists are often asked to hide breath-taking so as to not ‘interrupt’ the performance; in Lament, however, the use of air is exposed and lends a physical, even tangible, quality to the music. The form I discovered later in this search which corresponds directly to a short section of the musical work both incorporates and derives from, in part, the materialness of Lament.

In addition to an intense interest in both the dance performance and music of Riverdance I began to notice, as of four or five years ago, a similar captivation with certain films that incorporate well-composed music which could also stand alone, apart from the on-screen action. More important than an attraction toward the particular music or performance in Riverdance or film was the state of intent awareness and immersion—a feeling that my mind was working at its best, making connections, seeing relationships, generating new ideas, and opening up into new kinds of understanding—I always entered (and still enter) while watching this type of interaction between musical and visual language. As I recognized more and more a sense of contact with the music I became interested in following and further understanding this sense of connection as well as the music itself; it was my intention to find and create visual forms which correspond
directly to musical works and to use these forms to understand the music and then use the music to understand what I had created.

I struggled initially to understand ‘form’. I found I could recognize when others referred to a ‘form’ in a painting or in nature, but I had difficulty seeing and identifying form for myself. The art work on the following page was an early attempt at connecting music and visual form. This watercolor, India ink, oil pastel, and chalk drawing was done while listening to the music from the film The Village, and although it does possess, like music, a certain moving, flowing, lyrical quality, I do not believe it corresponds directly to that particular musical score. I found, in this instance, I could not draw and listen to the music at the same time—I was either hearing the music and not drawing or drawing and not hearing the music at all (though one could say I was hearing and incorporating the music on a more subconscious level). In addition, I continued to work on this piece at intervals without listening to any music—continuing to follow the form of the work rather than forms exclusive to the music. Though I like the drawing, I realized after its making that it does not represent or contain or embody what I was trying to do in this investigation—which was to identify specific visual forms that are the visual equivalent of a section of music (or in other words, if one could take a picture of a piece of music or any given section of the music what would it look like?). Instead, this piece took on a life of its own and can stand for itself, apart from any musical work or interpretation relating to music.

Throughout my search I had many opportunities to diverge from my interest in Lament and even from the subject of musical and visual form; however, I believe I was compelled to continue following and making my own understanding of this musical work and the visual form(s) therein. For instance, many composers, artists, writers, and probably thinkers/creators in
other fields such as physics and math regard their best work as coming not from them but them, as if the work already existed and only needed to be found or happened upon. This is how I feel, in part, about the form below, which was the first of my significant visual form creations and corresponds to a very short (about three seconds) section of Lament. While I do sense I ‘discovered’ the form (in the sense that explorers ‘discover’ what already exists) I also think of it as my creation—as something others would never behold had I not given it visual existence. Similar to the thesis statement of a research paper, this form both stands on its own as a direct correlation to a section of Lament while also encapsulating the entire song. I have come to call this a ‘rising form’, although there may be a better description of its reality. The essential components of this form are the horizontal encircling (there is that idea of circles or circling again related to the possibility of music being circular) plane and the vertical component which appears to be rising from the center. In addition, if this were one frame on a reel of film and continued forward I imagine the rising component lowering, returning back to the center—relating to the total musical work which lives within certain range and quality excepting this one section that rises in tone and quality for just a few notes before returning to the core of musical action. I’ve looked at this form on many occasions and currently am seeing the vertical part as not merely rising but pushing upward, much like the movement of air through the uilleann pipes at this particular place in the music. As a bodily sensation perhaps this form would be like a morning stretch where one pushes the arms upward, leaving normal body posture and center of gravity for a few seconds and then lowering, returning the arms and body posture to center. It is apparent this form differs
from the previous artwork—the rising form is much more specific and concise and relates
directly to a precise section of music.

Throughout the semester I learned to differentiate ways of making visual form: drawing
an emotional response to a musical piece, making a map of the melody (which might look like a
line corresponding to the horizontal and vertical direction of notes in the score), drawing the idea
or concept of the music, and then there is the very thing itself—what it has to be in order to be
that and nothing else. The rising form could be relegated to the first three categories of
description—the notes on the musical score do move upward (or rise) in this particular place in
the piece; one might sense a certain emotion like lifting in this section of music; and perhaps this
place in the music could be conceptualized as a deep breath. However, I believe the rising form
is this place in the music and not just an emotional response or mapping of the melody or
intellectual idea.

After finding this rising form I made a series of ‘rising forms’ which can be seen on the
preceding pages. These forms were made in response to the first rising form and were also drawn
while listening to Lament. Though I had the rising form in mind they are not copies of the initial
rising form. Some are more different from one another than others, however, all share two
essential elements in common which allow them to retain the title of ‘rising form’: a horizontal
plane or ground and a vertical rising component. And, though different, I believe each is very
close to the actuality of the three second long section of Lament and succeeds in making visual
contact with this musical form. I include this series of created forms because I consider them to
be my significant findings and also because I hope others may view and interpret and experience
these rising forms in their own unique manner.
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